



Monastery of the Ascension

THE DESERT CHRONICLE

Vol. XXXV, Number 2 - JUNE 2026

“FAR ABOVE CAYUGA’S WATERS...”

By Ron Pepin

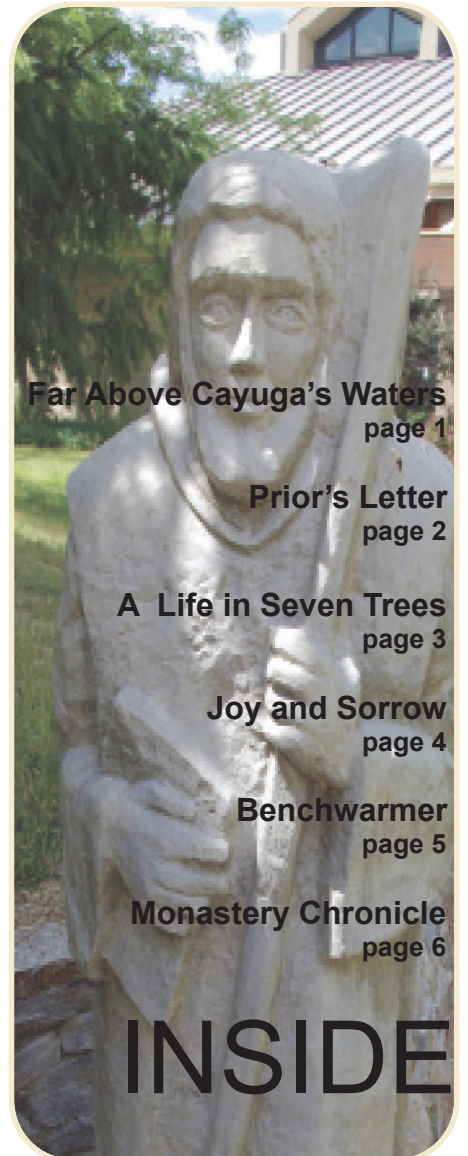
The stately and scenic campus of Cornell University is perched high above Cayuga Lake in Ithaca, New York. This is where I first met Father Hugh Feiss in June, 1986. We introduced ourselves while standing in the registration line at a summer seminar for college teachers sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities. He and I had been selected to join ten other participants in a study of “Latin Christian Tradition” directed by Robert Kaske, a distinguished professor at the university. Father Hugh and I immediately recognized our common background and shared interests. For eight weeks, we lived across the hall from each other in a dormitory, ate meals together, spent hours in the library, and took evening strolls that culminated in visits to an ice cream shop. In short, we became friends.

Our friendship has now lasted forty years. During that time, we have exchanged views and articles, collaborated on books, and

maintained a regular correspondence. For almost twenty summers in a row, Father and I taught Elderhostel (Road Scholar) classes at the Monastery of the Ascension on such topics as “Medieval Murder Mysteries” and “Ancient Rome.” During those pleasant, productive days, we found time to discuss books, watch birds (including the great horned owls that nested there) and, of course, enjoy more ice cream. One memorable July day, we walked several miles in sweltering heat to visit a friend of his and her cats. I cherish those memories.

Father Hugh is a humble Benedictine, entirely devoted to his priestly ministry. I have never heard him boast, despite all his accomplishments as a scholar, teacher, translator, author, naturalist, environmentalist and champion of social justice. He is also a loyal fan of Notre Dame sports teams, and the Boston Red Sox.

Continues on page 5



Far Above Cayuga’s Waters
page 1

Prior’s Letter
page 2

A Life in Seven Trees
page 3

Joy and Sorrow
page 4

Benchwarmer
page 5

Monastery Chronicle
page 6

INSIDE

HUGH FEISS, BENEDICTINE

I thank my God for all my memories of you.
Whenever I pray for all of you, my prayers are joyful.
And this is my prayer,
that your love may grow richer and richer
in knowledge and insight of every kind
so that you may learn
to prize what is highest and best.
May you reap the full harvest of true goodness
that comes through JESUS CHRIST
to the glory and praise of God.

SAINC PAUL

**ORDAINED TO PRIESTLY SERVICE
MAY 11, 1966**

Prior's Letter



THE CREATOR
HAS MADE THE
WORLD... COME
AND SEE IT.

a prayer of the PIMA INDIANS

Dear Friends of the Monastery,

Blessings to all of you. We just celebrated the Solemnity of the Ascension, our patronal feast. It was a grand occasion. Our MSP community arranged to make it a truly festive day. There was an outdoor bi-lingual Mass attended by 300 people. The area in front of the monastery was filled with booths providing a variety of foods, and the afternoon had performances of music and dancing.

For us, it was a celebration in remembrance of our coming to Idaho in 1965. For our MSP brothers, it was a sign of the effect of their ministry with the Hispanic community. I think, for both groups, it was a very positive experience.

Looking at the 1965 time of our arrival in Idaho made me think about what we have been doing and why we have done so. I looked at our Mission and Goal statement. Part of it reads: "Aware of God's love, our intention and commitment is to seek God in this monastery... mindful of and responsive to the signs of the time and our particular setting here in Southern Idaho... We want to make our contribution to the local Church, of which we are a part, out of our Benedictine way of life."

One of the passages for Ascension comes from Acts 1, 8: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you to be my witnesses in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth." That probably included Southern Idaho. As I reflect on what has been done, not all of it but a lot of it has made a contribution to the local Church. We've "given it our best shot."

We're not done. What we do now "responsive to the signs of the time and our particular setting here in Southern Idaho" is not the same as what we did ten years ago. Age and physical ability put some restrictions on what we do. And learning how to live with that can be a challenge. But God's grace supports us and gives us the ability to see the blessings and give thanks.

We give thanks now for our confrere Fr. Hugh Feiss as he has been ordained a priest for 60 years. I think there is more about him in this issue. His intellectual work and pastoral ministry touch the lives of many.

That's it for this time. Please keep us in your prayers and be assured of our prayers for you.

Peace and good things!

Fr. Boniface Lautz, OSB, Prior



TRIPTYCH 1 - A LIFE IN SEVEN TREES

By Hugh Feiss, OSB

I have been a priest for 60 years, during which I have had a wide variety of teaching and ministerial assignments - including basketball coach and hike leader - and met countless wonderful people. I cannot begin to name them all, so I will mention instead the trees that have inspired me by their quiet, persevering witness.

For part of the first grade, I lived with my grandparents in Sloat, California, where there was a mill operated by the Quincy Lumber Company. Near the one-room schoolhouse was a giant pine tree (my recollection is that it was a Sugar Pine, but that may be incorrect). It had thick bark, with layers made up of jigsaw puzzle pieces. It was a strong sentinel. Sometimes I hugged it.

For the rest of my grade school years, we lived in a house on West Broadway in Eugene, Oregon. We had several Hawthorn trees in the front yard. They had pretty blossoms, but also spikey thorns that made it dangerous to touch them.

My 43 years at Mount Angel were rich in tree companions. Oddly, it was not the corona of Sequoias that captured my attention. In the undeveloped back of butte, there were some Oregon white (Garry) oaks. One of them was old and split and, in the crevasses, there were nests of white-breasted nuthatches. This thin-soiled area had a cover of dried grass in the summer, which contrasted with the rampant green of the rest of the hill.

When I was living in a third story room on the south side in a corner room of the monastery, a cypress tree grew outside my window. Birds would sing from it early in the morning. At night, skunks on the ground beneath woke me with their chattering.

Near the library office was a Shore pine planted in the lawn at a corner where the wind sometimes swirled fiercely. The soil was thin over the rocky ground. For many years, contorted but fiercely clinging by its roots, the tree was there to greet us when we came to work. Then one stormy day I came to find it ripped out of the ground by the wind, no longer able to say good morning.

For almost four decades, I spent a month in a trailer near Unity Lake in Eastern Oregon. I had lived in that high desert country as a small child. My baby footprint was in the cement at a nearby ranch. The trailer was next to a church, which was built

around the time I was ordained a priest. Behind the church was a tree, the only one on the property. It was an evergreen, shading a marker commemorating someone who had died before I started going there. There are three stained glass windows in the church, one of them dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi, in memory of my parents. The people who came to the church were wonderful. I wrote part or most of my books there in the winter solitude.



My last stop is the Monastery of the Ascension. As at Mount Angel, the founders deliberately planted many kinds of trees. There is a lane with a verge of spruce trees on both sides, the haunts of Great horned owls. However, the tree that calls me the most is a Japanese plum, which has beautiful pink blossoms and purple leaves. It is very symmetrical and the lower limbs extend straight out a long way from the trunk in a gravity defying way. After a snowstorm, it looks like a big snowball.

God has been good to me. The trees are just one of his many gifts; not one of the trees was a matter of ownership or exploitation. The plum tree is a graceful adornment of a grace-full world. The big pine tree was a manifestation of the providence of God. The tenacious Shore pine a call to perseverance in the face of adversity.

For all that has been, thanks. For what is to come on this earth - and beyond it - hope. Blessed be the Lord and blessed are all, God; and human, animal, vegetable or mineral comrades who have made my life and ministry possible and joyful.



TRIPTYCH 2 - JOY AND SORROW

By Hugh Feiss, OSB

In the best selling novel, *Theo of Golden*, Theo has a discussion with Asher, an artist who has drawn dozens of beautiful portraits of townspeople, which are displayed in a local coffee shop. Theo sees sadness in all their faces. Theo explains, "When we're young, we're usually too busy or too self-absorbed to see it but by the time one is almost ninety, this world has beat the sadness into him quite deeply... I realize more and more that it is a gift. Living with sadness, accepting it, is easier than trying to pretend it isn't there. It is another of life's great mysteries that sadness and joy can coexist so compatibly with one another... Sadness can make us bitter or wise. We get to choose."

When I read those lines, I was sad, because the drawings reminded me of two things that I loved when I was a child. One was a quilt that my grandmother had given me; the other a drawing of a horse. The story of Asher's drawing made me think of that drawing.

My grandfather was a foreman in what was called a box factory or planing mill, which made components for wooden boxes and molding for doors and windows from pine lumber produced at the adjoining mill. One of the men who worked with my grandfather was a very skilled artist who made pencil drawings on scraps of wood. He gave me a beautiful drawing of a horse. Sometime in the subsequent 75 years, both the drawing and the quilt have been lost. I am sad that I have not kept them.

The mill where my grandfather worked was surrounded by a company town of little red houses, each heated by burning wood scraps in a pot-bellied stove. There was a small company store near the post office, but for most supplies and for an occasional movie, my grandparents drove 20 miles to the county seat. They lived a very simple, quiet life and seemed rather somber to me. Decades later, I learned both had fled in their teens to the west coast from bad situations back home.

The Hellenistic philosophers bequeathed to St. Augustine - and he handed on to the Middle Ages - a short list of basic affects (passions, feelings, emotions). Joy and sorrow were among them. By one reckoning, joy was the feeling engendered by having what you loved; sorrow: the feeling that arose that you did not have what you loved. This having is not necessarily ownership or possession; it could be the view of a sunset over a river or a feeling of God's presence. One can be joyful about a letter from a

friend and, at the same time, sad about the death of a cat. One can also be happy generally, with a sadness engendered by the weight of misery resting on the world. I have never known anyone well who did not have such sadness.



Perhaps sadness is another word for discontent. It is hard to imagine someone perfectly content with life in this world. In all of us, it seems, there is a longing and sadness about something that is beyond our reach and our ability to name it. Kierkegaard wrote that our spirit shares in both the infinite and the finite, the temporal and the eternal. One can love this world very much, have many friends, but know that the world cannot be the place of unalloyed happiness. Like so many things, this life is only perfected by leaving it behind.

In Lent, we thought of Christ, "the man of sorrows" (Isaiah 53:3). He deliberately entered time and space from eternity and infinity in order to experience our sadness and offer hope that this is not our final state. His sadness was perhaps intensified by the fact that, as God, he had placed us in this world of limited time and unfulfilled longings, but at the same time he could rejoice that those very longings brought the wisdom Theo spoke of: a human wisdom that lived at the nexus of time and eternity, sadness and joy, like the cross extending from earth to heaven, while embracing all humanity with bloodied heart and hands.

By taking up our sadness, Christ points to the way beyond it and empowers us with hope to travel through and so beyond it.



TRIPTYCH 3 - BENCHWARMER

By Hugh Feiss, OSB

I recently listened to a short interview with a member of Notre Dame's women's basketball team. After high school, she went to a smaller university where she was a starter and co-captain. She played two years there and spent a third recovering from an injury. She then transferred to Notre Dame, where she seldom plays in a game. She acknowledged that the move required a big adjustment on her part, but she seems to have no regrets that she made it.

During the interview, she mentioned three things that she does to contribute to the team. During practices, she tries to push the starters who play most of the time during games. Practices are very strenuous. It is taken for granted that everyone will work hard, pushing each other to be better and growing as a team. Secondly, from the bench, she is deeply involved in every game, cheering and encouraging her teammates, watching their every move, increasing her knowledge of the game, the team, and their opponents. Thirdly, she must be ready to contribute immediately if the coach decides to send her into the game. She is a good three-point shooter, and that may enable her to contribute during the rare minutes when she is on the floor during a game. The overall impression was that she loved the game and her teammates, and was happy to be part of the team.

The interview had something to say about being a good team member in the church. As St. Paul said, we are differentiated members of the one body of Christ, each with something to contribute to our communities. A minority of us have managerial and leadership skills; those who do can lead a church's activities. The rest of us should contribute as our

skills and opportunities allow. We should think of whatever the community does as ours, not "theirs." We should encourage each other in our different roles, recognizing the value of all.

The idea of benchwarming has a special resonance in the liturgy where, in fact, most of us sit on benches. Vatican II urged the full, active, conscious participation of everyone in the sacred mysteries. That means our minds and hearts are actively engaged together in what is taking place. We are offering Christ and ourselves to God the Father, asking God to help us all to know and love Him and each other, and serve others in our lives beyond the church building, even beyond the church community. At the center is Christ, offering himself to the Father and to us, body and blood, soul and divinity. The rituals of the liturgy, bench-sitting, standing or kneeling, reading and listening, silence or song, prayers of address and response are meant to weld us into a community of praise and prayer.

Ministers of the Eucharist - presider, server, reader, song leader, greeter and janitor - are at the service of the sacrament being celebrated by the community. We are all on the court, praying the game, a game at once joyful and serious, personal and communal. No one should be on the sidelines, watching. Frequently, we hear "let us pray" or say "amen," to draw our attention back to what is happening for and with us, a dynamic interchange between the infinitely loving heart of God and our finite but expandable hearts. The place where these two meet is the body of Christ, physical, ecclesial, and Eucharistic.

Continued from page 1

As I write these words on a lovely day in May, two beautiful Baltimore Orioles are making their first annual appearance in the peach trees in my yard. Father Hugh would delight in seeing them and in praising all the wonders of God's creation here in Connecticut, Oregon, Idaho, at Cornell, and in all the places that his wide travels have taken him.

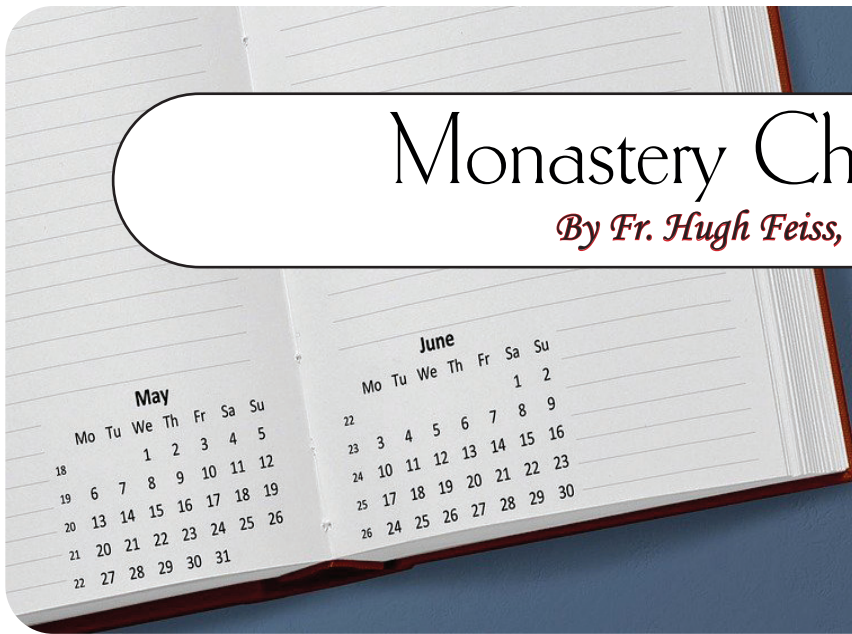
Congratulations, Father Hugh, on your 60th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood. Ad Multos Annos!

*Father Hugh celebrates Mass at the end of the
2026 Lenten community retreat.*



Monastery Chronicle

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB



February 2026

February 18: Ash Wednesday ashes at our 7:05 AM Mass; Missionaries in evening; “The Chosen” at 7.
February 20: Twenty people for second Adult Faith Class, St. Paul’s spirituality; Cathy arrives for stay.
February 21: Boise oblates meet by Zoom. Two Flickers checking our trees.
February 22: Fr. Boniface celebrates Sunday Mass. Monks’ retreat begins in evening
February 23: Cathy departs. Retreat with lectio discussions; Centering prayer videos.
February 24: Fr. Abram departs with blessing. Plenty of rain. Leak in community room dampens a video on sitting comfortably.
February 25: Wet and cloudy. Home health visits. Morning retreat discussion. “The Chosen” viewing.
February 26: MSP and Faith Formation classes.
February 27: Retreat ends. Renewal of vows.
February 28: MSP couple’s retreat. Monthly social. Dorothy Day’s Food Cupboard arrives.

March 2026

March 3: Fr. Meinrad’s birthday. Foot care and massage from Home Health. Windows replaced.
March 4: Home health checkups. Wind and rain in late afternoon. Roof doesn’t leak. Chosen.
March 5: Snow in the morning; melted by noon. MSP class; Faith Formation.
March 8: Fr. Boniface celebrates Sunday Mass; Daylight Savings Time begins.

March 10: Fr. Ezekiel’s Name Day. Heat out in chapel.
March 11: The windows project is finished. Looks nice.
March 12: Fr. Hugh rides with MSP to attend Chrism Mass and jubilarians’ luncheon. No classes.
March 13: Br. Sylvester’s birthday; Oblate retreat begins with 20 attending Tish O’Hagan’s presentations on liturgy.
March 14: Oblate retreat. MSP Biblical retreat. Corn beef and soda bread at lunch.
March 15: Retreat concludes. Duet at Mass (Br. Selby and Joanne Draper) with peregrination of Robbie. Birthday celebration for Br. Sylvester: balloons, big card, chocolate cake and singing.
March 16: Fr. Jesús celebrates morning Mass. Linda Hurley, who works some in the business office, is in the hospital in serious condition. Biopsy results not back yet. We are praying for her.
March 17-18: Fr. Boniface anoints John W’s sister.
March 19: Feast of St. Joseph passes quietly. Fr. Boniface goes fishing with a family whose the three-year-old caught the only fish.
March 21: Feast of St. Benedict. The plum tree is glorious. Trees are budding.
March 22: Fr. Boniface presides at Sunday Mass. Twin Falls OCIA gathering.
March 23: Amy Jaskowiak visits from Illinois.
March 25: John Wasko takes Fr. Boniface to visit Linda Hurley at St. Luke’s, Twin Falls.
March 26: Adult Faith class; Food Cupboard stocked. Night temp to be 29 degrees.
March 28: Missionaries preparing for many Holy Week events in Spanish.



March 29: Palm Sunday. Monks process to chapel with palms and singing from dining room. Fr. Hugh celebrant.

April 2026

April 2: Holy Thursday. 6:30 AM - Lamentations at Vigils for next three days by Fr. Kenneth, Br. Selby, Fr Boniface sing them. Fr. Boniface presides at 7:30 pm liturgy. No foot washing. Modest sized congregation with some old friends.

April 3: Good Friday. Chapter of Faults at 9:00 am. Service at 5:00 pm, small congregation. Reading of Passion: Br. Selby and Br. Tobiah. Liturgy: Fr. Hugh and Br. Sylvester. Tabernacle of repose in sacristy. Traditional hot cross buns (from Sylvia) and hot chocolate. Linda Hurley dies after a brief illness.

April 4: Easter vigil. Decorations by Br. Sylvester and helpers. Fr. Boniface celebrant. Started with fire (Harold B) in dining room courtyard. Processed to chapel. Exultet recited by Fr. Boniface. Readings by monks and lay people. Blessing of holy water and renewal of baptismal promises. Service ended at 9:45.

April 5: Easter morning Mass. Overflow crowd. Many visitors including welcome number of children. Many old friends. Renewal of baptismal promises. Easter dinner after noon prayer. Six monks and six guests. Vesper/Compline at:5:30. Fr. Jesus departs with a lay missionary to renew his visa at the Mexican border.

April 6: Daily order. Fr. Boniface celebrant. One visitor in the retreat house.

April 8: Last adult education class on St. Paul. Monks watched "The Chosen" after supper.

April 9-11: Presbyterian women's retreat. Oblate Janne Goldbeck is a presenter.

April 12: Fr. Boniface presides at community Mass. Cathy returns for overnight stay after her luggage got rained on at the "Garden fo Eden." Haustus.

April 13: Cathy to Subway to hitch a ride. Her hearing is very bad.

April 14: Linda Hurley's funeral at St. Edward's; burial here in columbarium presided over by Fr. Boniface. MSP seminarians restart classes.

April 14-16: Episcopal clergy here for retreat. Br. James OSB, an Episcopalian monk from Nebraska, speaks to them on Centering Prayer.

April 15: Saw first raptors. Fr. Boniface to chiropractor in Twin Falls.

April 16: A dusting of snow overnight. 26 degrees at 9 am. Apple blossoms seem okay.

April 17: Sharp variations in weather. Pocatello oblates meet via Zoom.

April 18: Both Teologia and Biblico studies Saturday with MSP. Idaho Falls oblates.

April 19: Some people had a big pork cook out for the Missionaries. Ten students, faculty and chaperons arrive from the Ambrose School (Boise) for a retreat. Monastery oblates meet.

April 20: Fr. David MSP says Monday Mass. Ambrose school folks join for noon prayer and Vespers.

April 21: Ambrose school group depart; Fr. Boniface, Br. Tobiah, Fr. David, and Br. Luis depart for Cottonwood to visit Fr. Meinrad. Plan to return on Thursday. Fierce wind. Fr. Gonzalez from Jerome stops by.

April 22: Cold, blustery wet. Only 4 monks and 2 Missionaries. Brothers Sergio and Carlos MSP to Idaho Falls overnight. Home health had quick visit.

April 23: Fr. Kenneth celebrates community Mass. Travelers return from Cottonwood and Idaho Falls.

April 24: Another cold and blustering day.

April 26: Fr. Boniface presides at community Mass.

April 27 – May 1: Diocesan diaconate retreat for four candidates, Deacons Sal and Jason, Chancellor Bryon Taylor here to conduct it.

April 29: Fr. Boniface presides assisted by Deacon Sal.

April 30: Last MSP class.

May 2026

May 2: Fr. Hugh visits Centennial Marsh.

May 3: Fr. Boniface celebrates Sunday Mass. Food cupboard gets restocked. Dancers practice for the Ascension Festival the Missionaries are putting on.

May 4: Fr. Fernando MSP, who is here till Fr. Jesús returns from visa renewal celebrates Mass. Three episcopalian priests here for retreat. They are a big boost to the singing in church.

May 5: Melissa here for footcare. Storm clouds pass by. Oblate monthly meeting on Zoom: participants from Michigan, Boseman, MT, Pennsylvania, Boise and Twin Falls-Jerome. Conversation centered on the churches' and our roles to foster human flourishing.

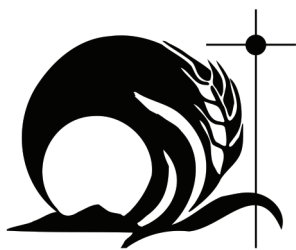
May 6: Episcopalians depart. Home health nurse here to check on us. A nice day.

May 8: Birthday of Sir David Attenborough and Fr. Hugh. VE Day, Germany surrenders in 1945.

May 9: Large AA group begins retreat.

May 10: Idaho Falls oblates meet via Zoom. Beautiful flower array delivered from oblates.





NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
P A I D
BOISE, IDAHO
PERMIT No. 849

THE DESERT CHRONICLE
The Benedictine Monks of Idaho, Inc.
Monastery of the Ascension
541 East 100 South
Jerome, ID 83338-5655

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

English transition of the *Golden Sequence for Pentecost*. Latin, c. 1200, author unknown.

Come, Holy Spirit, come!
And from your celestial home
Shed a ray of light divine!

Come, Father of the poor!
Come, source of all our store!
Come, within our bosoms shine.

You, of comforters the best;
You, the soul's most welcome guest;
Sweet refreshment here below;

In our labor, rest most sweet;
Grateful coolness in the heat;
Solace in the midst of woe.

O most blessed Light divine,
Shine within these hearts of yours,
And our inmost being fill!

Where you are not, we have naught,
Nothing good in deed or thoughts,
Nothing free from taint of ill.

Heal our wounds, our strength renew;
On our dryness pour your dew;
Wash the stains of guilt away.

Bend the stubborn heart and will;
Melt the frozen, warm the chill;
Guide the steps that go astray.

On the faithful, who adore
And confess you, evermore
In your sevenfold gift descend;

Give them virtue's sure reward;
Give them your salvation, Lord;
Give them joys that never end.

Amen. Alleluia.



The Desert Chronicle is available in digital form on the monastery website: www.idabomonks.org.
If you would like to receive the Desert Chronicle in digital form and cancel your paper subscription,
please email Fr. Hugh: hughf@idabomonks.org and send him your email address.